

Economic Development Advisory Council

11.14.12 Meeting minutes

Americana Room – Hampshire Hills

Present:

Michael Brisebois, Hitchiner Mfg Co
Brad Chappell, Chappell Tractor
Matt Ciardelli, Ciardelli Fuel Co
Chris Costantino, Conservation Commission
Mark Fougere, Board of Selectmen
Tracy Hutchins, DO-IT
Janet Langdell, Planning Board
Heather Leach, Centrix Bank
John McCormack, TIFD
Penny Seaver, Bean Seaver & Smith
John Siergiewicz, Hollis Line Machine Co
Sean Trombly, Trombly Gardens
Dale White, Leighton A White, Inc.

Excused:

George Infanti, Milford Paint

Bill Parker, Director Community Development
Gary Chabot, NH
Shirley Wilson, Recording secretary

M. Ciardelli called the meeting to order at 7:30AM and welcomed new member Michael Brisebois.

Minutes:

D. White made a motion to accept the minutes from 4/14/12. S. Trombly seconded and all in favor.

Discussion and Prioritization on Suggested EDAC Projects:

Business Outreach Survey/Community Development Office Customer Satisfaction Survey

B. Parker said he with spoke with Gary Chabot to get some examples for the Policies & Procedures survey and as previously discussed, to follow up on some of the work we've done. We want to get it out to the business community and see where to better serve their business needs, what their issues are and what this group can do.

J. McCormack said like other communities with similar efforts, this group has been very enthusiastic but without specific projects and mandates, we are in danger of petering out. Perhaps we've reached this point and need a re-alignment. We should look at the original mandate, check the alignment and see if we are still in touch with the people we're trying to serve. We've accomplished a lot with the internal departments, but it is important to look from the outside, in. B. Parker noted that the Policies & Procedure group talked about a specific customer satisfaction survey for Community Development department in regards to permitting and that specific process. Do we want to do two very different types of surveys? D. White said surveys tend to be round filed and a roundtable would be more effective. We should invite every business owner and developer who wants to come, tell them what we've done, and solicit their input. We should also do the satisfaction survey; it is a fresh opportunity for us to go out and meet with those customers who have pulled building permits over the last two or three years with a simple survey and get some input of their experiences. A lot of good changes have been made within the departments, but if in fact the economy is at its lowest point, now it the time to hear the good and the bad and the needed changes will be obvious.

T. Hutchins said she likes the idea of a roundtable; it also puts a face to this group. This group's membership represents all types of businesses and community groups and that gives other business people in the community the opportunity to associate us with this group, whereas only a very small percentage of surveys come back. P. Seaver brought up the Elm St zoning changes and the large turnout for the breakfast meeting. H. Leach suggested holding a roundtable and then handing out a survey at the end. Talking to somebody is very different than just emailing out a survey. J. Langdell noted that the satisfaction survey should involve the whole process, for all departments including the BOS, not just the Building or Community Development Department. M. Fougere said we need to do this immediately; the sooner the better. J. Langdell said if this survey, the one-on-one interviews,

and the responses are analyzed prior to the roundtable, we would have a product to show. It would be a piece that we could bring to say; here's what was identified, here's what we worked on and here's the outcome assessment of our work.

M. Brisebois said this group does good work in trying to promote and bring the government together with the businesses. Hitchiner had a big expansion this past year and our experience was that it is not just the Town, but it's the State and other organizations. There is a need for resources and also confusion from the public in regards to who does what and people don't necessarily care what this group does until they want something. EDAC could be to promote an ability to liaison companies with who they have to contact at the State or in other organizations. J. Langdell said one of our fostering items was the development of a true economic development website that would have a lot of that type information; business contacts, how to negotiate DES, etc. There are pieces floating out there but certainly not to the depth of a liaison network. M. Brisebois said it comes with the burden of pitching your message in multiple ways. Surveys, even with a 2-3% response are something you can continue to point to, along with your websites, and roundtables. The bottom line is to keep pitching your message and eventually somebody will recognize what you do or who you represent.

G. Chabot said to call him if there is anything this group needs, but he cautioned everyone by asking what are you looking for with the survey or roundtable? You might get different results, so tailor the path you want to go down. He gave several examples and then asked what do the businesses in Milford need? Do you want job creation, finance, trade, government contracts, or skilled labor which is a major issue? Hit the areas you want and put a framework around what you want to achieve. There used to be a program called Business Visit Program Interviews (BVP) and it was good because the businesses were interviewed in a controlled situation and you got some tangible information.

J. McCormack noted that this group also reached out to the business community by going to several companies in town. G. Chabot said there is a big appreciation factor there from the businesses. M. Fougere said he was involved in a similar program a long time ago here with the MIDC. One of the problems with that survey was that it was very long. It was more effective when two of us visited every major employer in town. A lot of businesses are too busy to attend a roundtable discussion, so having that sit down was beneficial. People would get everything off their chest; people who might not be comfortable in large groups could vent.

P. Seaver said the one-on-one and the survey should include all businesses not just the large companies. This community is made up of many small businesses and we should reach out to them as well. G. Chabot added that the issues are totally different. Major businesses might be focused on permitting or workforce where a smaller company would be all about the financing. J. Langdell said the focus of the satisfaction survey is the permitting process and what you might find is a spectrum of responses from large and small businesses. The survey could be tailored to the specifics of "the process" and then add, what else can we get from you so it could have a dual purpose. You will get some of that foundation information to take forward in crafting the next roundtable.

M. Brisebois the Chamber of Commerce learned, from one of their surveys, that there is an opportunity to market the group. You could put an ad in a newspaper to encourage businesses to fill out the survey, do the mailing, do the roundtable, and do the sit down with a good cross section of businesses. The survey is a great opportunity for you to market EDAC and what the vision and mission is as well as learn about your local businesses. A lot of people don't spend the time to know what is going on with EDAC; they are running their businesses. We could twist it around and ask "are you aware that the EDAC provides this service? Have you visited our website? If you haven't, are you aware of a few things? It is a way of reinforcing and setting somebody's mind and getting the positive; otherwise you end up with a lot of complaints and have a hard time finding the common denominator.

D. White said the bottom line is that our basis has to focus on economic development. What can we do to bring economic development to Milford, NH and draw or keep a company from someplace else? M. Ciardelli said we also need to figure out who to bring this information to. Do we bring the results to the BOS and are they on board with listening to what we've found and what the community has told us? Is now the time to make changes with Bill leaving? Will we be spinning our wheels again or do we get some traction as we go through these efforts? M. Fougere said there will be many issues that the departments can handle on their own, but the BOS will certainly get involved with policies.

J. Langdell said we still don't have an economic development policy for Milford. T. Hutchins added that we haven't really defined what economic development is for Milford and what the goals should be. M. Fougere said we have a definition and a vision statement; they are listed on this agenda. J. Langdell said we have tangibles, we have a fostering document with vision steps and action items, but that is not necessarily a town policy. What is the town willing to do, or give up, or compromise on? M. Fougere said if we're going to be more relevant, this group will have to meet more than once every six months. We need to start doing things. J. Langdell stated that this group has been very active, in the past.

H. Leach said she had a hard time mixing the survey for the building and permitting process and economic development as a whole. They should be two totally separate things and the timeline doesn't line up. The roundtable should be a separate piece and held later, maybe in March. J. McCormack said the survey gives opportunity to let people say what's on their mind and discussion followed. H. Leach said we also need to be cognizant that to remain relevant, recruitment of people with fresh energy and passion is a key piece and we will not necessarily accomplish that by a permit survey. The roundtable could be a recruiting and message sending effort.

P. Seaver suggested that EDAC could send a representative to all Board meetings, not to get into their business, per se, but guidance or resources. J. Langdell said that would be advantageous for the boards and commissions so they can understand what our goals are and then incorporate that thinking about EDAC into their process and planning. P. Seaver said it is also another avenue for the public to recognize economic development members.

D. White suggested we only send two people out because this is not a witch hunt; we want the good and the not so good. M. Fougere said many developers and contractors will be very leery to have their name attached to any negative comments, so it will have to be an X. D. White said that's their choice, but you can't fix something if you don't know it's broke. J. Langdell said some changes were made and we need to assess the outcome of those changes and ask were those changes effective? What was the outcome of the change in attitude that we're open for business? Has that mindset translated from what was said, what was implemented to the actions? B. Chappell said we should be clear that the responses are about recent experiences. J. McCormack said when we went into the second round of internal interviews there was much keener sense of process and time is money. J. Langdell noted that was internal, not at the customer level. That's what we need to find out; did it transfer out?

Timeline for Outcome Assessment Survey:

Get a list of 10 questions from P&P subcommittee members by end of November

Get full list of projects within the past two years from the office

Set a target list of 20-30 customers to interview

Get help from EDAC to team up in groups of two EDAC members

Set appointments by end of January, 2013

Review survey data by end of January, 2013

Report data to EDAC in February

Pull together for Roundtable in April

John and Bill to meet this week to get the process going

Branding and Marketing (Rochester, NH example)

T. Hutchins explained that MIT is no longer a Mainstreet committee and there is no New Hampshire association, so we've been meeting with counterparts and like communities. One of the things that Rochester did was a branding initiative and they just brought in two new companies that created 600 new jobs. Our subcommittee has discussed how to get over that branding hump and how to do this on our own. Is it realistic to do a campaign and get a new logo only to have the Town not fund it? Rochester made branding a priority, put out a nationwide RFP, and hired the Glen Group from Conway, NH to gather the information and have a product to start building the campaign. Rochester put this as a line item in their budget. The RFP was \$25,000-50,000 and the Glen Group was hired for around \$15,000 to start the initiative, contact the different groups, hold the meetings, get the consensus and put something cohesive together. The enclosed PowerPoint came from their website and was a good report that we might want to consider doing. B. Chappell said you can tell that Rochester has energy. T. Hutchins said they definitely made it a priority and obviously they've had some success. M. Ciardelli asked if there were any tangibles, tax incentives or tax breaks. T. Hutchins said some tax breaks were put in place. Also,

you have to compare Rochester to Milford; they have some advantages that Milford doesn't have and also some disadvantages in that it is probably more economically depressed than Milford. B. Parker noted that a city form of government was also helpful. T. Hutchins also noted that Rochester has an economic development office and a full time director. G. Chabot said the new companies, Albany Engineering Composites and Safran, really appreciated the state's job training grant program, which is available to everybody in the state. J. Langdell asked Tracy for a bullet list of the incentives that were offered, so that we can know what we are competing against. G. Chabot suggested contacting Michael Bergeron to come speak at the next EDAC meeting. He actually did that deal and could tell you what brings people into New Hampshire like the ERZ's that Milford now has. He is a recruiter that covers the entire state but also works with companies who are expanding.

J. Langdell said Nashua is doing a huge campaign on branding and community identity. We could ask what else they are doing on an economic development level to incentivize and can we tap into it? P. Seaver said EDAC could give away bumper stickers with the town's logo and slogan. That way everyone feels like they are participating. T. Hutchins said Rochester felt that branding was a bigger project than what they could handle on their own. The Milford Improvement Team changed our logo last year on our own; however, to change it on a town level you would need to consensus from all the different stakeholders. I think we're going to meet some resistance and how do we bring everybody onboard? J. Langdell said maybe we're biting off a little too much? The logo is not a sacred cow and I get the visuals, but maybe what we need to work on is a consistent message. Why Milford? The answer to that question should be the same for the BOS, EDAC, the Planning Board, and local businesses because you can pretty up anything.

B. Parker said that goes back to what is the policy? All this branding and the logo has to be based on the town's policy. B. Chappell said he can't see the importance of the logo. D. White asked if we could have the Glen Company come to one of our meetings and see if we could get the BOS to appropriate some money for that in the budget. P. Seaver inquired if we had any marketing firms in Milford that we could be going to as we're trying to promote the whole concept of economic development here. D. White said we would want a company who's done this before. B. Parker said he agrees that we really need someone to facilitate the process. J. Langdell asked if MIT could get draft proposal of what the scope is and what we might be taking to the BOS or send it around for vetting. We need to decide if this is something we want to move forward with. T. Hutchins referenced the RFP included in today's paperwork as an example but said the point is that the city of Rochester thought this important enough to make it a priority, to put some money into it, and to do it right. We haven't quite decided that and I think Rochester was right in that they couldn't do it themselves. J. McCormack reiterated that it starts with a policy and then the package. B. Parker said this project should be mentioned in our next report to the BOS to get them thinking about it or at least to plant the seed. Bringing it forward right now, when we're unsure and when they are dealing with budget issues would be a tough sell. J. Langdell asked if we had examples of policies from Rochester and other communities such as Amherst, Exeter, Peterborough. B. Parker said they are out there.

M. Brisebois said we shouldn't get too far from the scope of the survey, but we could ask some good probing questions around what should the economic development plan look like; push for industry or big box? There should be some good spirited discussion around where you want to develop and what you want to develop. Competition is healthy and we should find out what we're up against. We want to keep businesses here in town and start up small businesses and the people who live here get that. It seems to me that Milford is a pretty business friendly place. It is not perfect and there has been a lot of wrangling in the past, but when you compare it to some other towns, Milford is a good place to do business unlike Amherst which is an absolute nightmare. We need a strategy, shore up our base and determine who to target. Then putting together an RFP and having someone to help guide us would have more value. Geographically Milford is not the best place and it is interesting how few people come to Milford from Nashua, Manchester and Concord. J. Langdell said we may find that we don't need to repackage if we can come up with a consistent message. M. Ciardelli asked if there were any action items from this discussion. T. Hutchins recommended that branding be put on hold until we develop a policy. T. Hutchins said her group can do some research.

Update on Eecotech Partners Discussion with the West Milford Tax Increment Financing District Advisory Board (TIF Board) on Former Police Station Acquisition/Possible TIF District Expansion

J. McCormack gave a brief update. We met with Ryan Bielagus of Eecotech and Jack Dugan of the Monadnock Economic Development Corporation at our last meeting. The main focus is on the former police station site and there is on-going environmental remediation that will continue on both that and the adjacent site for a long time. That severely hampers development and there have been meetings with the state to address those issues. The

Brox property still faces issues with access and today's economic climate. Working in conjunction with Jack and some other financing sources, the two main considerations are a hotel or an assisted living facility. Ryan, based on his experience, does see opportunity in the economics for both projects. J. Langdell asked what type of assisted living facility. B. Parker said we didn't have any details yet. J. McCormack said one of the tools is a possible expansion of the TIF district and he referenced Jack's involvement with the new courthouse project in Keene. We might also be able to use Jack in our promotion of the project. B. Parker said Jack is very experienced in pulling together creative financing which will be new to us, so we may need some educational efforts, but we're moving forward. J. Langdell added that other economic development groups in the State are very active and involved in a lot of economic development. We've been trying to pull Jack in to our area for a long time. J. McCormack said Jack and Ryan were competitors for a number of years and are used to working together, so this is encouraging. J. Langdell asked if the TIF expansion only included the former police station site. B. Parker said we are also considering other areas.

Community Development Office/Planning Board/MIT Update:

- The Pine Valley Mill is a \$10M redevelopment project that was recently approved for a CDGB grant for tax credits from the NHFA. They are moving forward with historic preservation of the mill and they expect to break ground this spring.
- Airmar has begun site work for a 70,000SF expansion. They are moving forward now that business is back up to where it was before the recession.
- The new dialysis center at Lorden Plaza is under construction.
- The State Liquor Store is moving to the Market Basket Plaza where Blockbuster used to be.
- CVS is looking for a possible site; they went before the Planning Board with a conceptual plan at West and Elm Streets.
- There has been a lot of interest in the 99 Restaurant site on Nashua St. The owner is going to the ZBA for wetlands crossing approvals and a variance to create a back lot without any frontage. We have nothing definite yet, but things are happening out there.
- The Planning Board Housing Futures Evaluation is funded by a grant that will get the Nashua Regional Planning Commission to figure out where our regulations help promote housing in town, where they don't promote housing choices and look for consistencies and inconsistencies in our regulations to help implement the housing chapter of the Master Plan. The Board is looking at what densities make sense and where affordable housing makes sense.
- The Brox Environmental Citizens group is spearheaded by Suzanne Fournier and is very interested in preserving the Brox property as open space for the protection of natural resources out there. She has utilized a lot of staff time under the Right to know laws and has contacted several board and committee members.
- Janet, Chuck Worcester, Bill, a gentleman from the Preservation Alliance and individuals from the State met recently in regards to preserving the historic freight house on Cottage St. We said we'd spread the message to try to preserve this very unique railroad structure. There are only a few in New England built to serve the purpose that it does. We also met with MIT last week to see if they'd be interested in spearheading a reuse or purchase of that building, or something bigger because that whole area could use some redevelopment. They will discuss.

B. Parker told the group that Bill McKinney has given notice and has accepted a position in Nashua which leaves us with a vacancy and asked for the support of EDAC to fill that position. It is critical for customer service and permitting but they also do plan review, building inspection, health, code enforcement, emergency management. It's too much for one person and you run the risk of burn out and are left with no backup. J. Langdell added that it is not just Bill and Dana but also Bill Parker and we've already discussed that he wears many hats. If we're looking at him to take on more of an economic development role, some of his current duties like zoning administration may have to shift over. There is a lot of work that goes through that whole office.

Other Business:

Next meeting:

The next regular EDAC meeting will be scheduled for Wednesday, February 13, 2013.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00AM.

MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 14, 2012 MEETING WERE APPROVED ON FEBRUARY 20, 2013